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ABSTRACT

There is a need for conceptualization in the development of a Teacher Corps program and the instructional system which is part of that program. Program conceptualization should be viewed as an important process which permeates program design efforts. Conceptualization of program purposes and objectives provides a base for the design, development, and operation of program activities, evaluation, and management. The greater the specificity and explicitness of that conceptualization, the greater the likelihood of program success. Instructional system conceptualization involves the specification of competencies and the specification of instructional characteristics. The specification of competencies should be built on conceptualized role description; that is, specified in terms of the roles persons assume during the operation of the program, and/or in terms of those roles persons are expected to play upon the completion of the program. The specification of the instructional system's operational characteristics in advance of program operation is crucial, for it is this process which sets the "rules of the game". They should be detailed prior to the initiation of training activities. Conceptualization of the program and of the instructional system is a prerequisite to maximizing program effectiveness. (RC)

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THE NEED FOR CONCEPTUALIZATION IN PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT[1]

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Introduction

In this discussion, a Teacher Corps program is viewed as a temporary organization which has as its major purpose institutional change which is intended to improve the educational opportunities provided low-income, minority children. Thus, program efforts focus primarily on two goals: (1) facilitating the achievement of those institutional objectives which are intended to improve the quality of instruction experienced by children; and (2) facilitating the achievement of institutional objectives which are intended to improve the quality of the professional preparation experienced by preservice and inservice teachers. The internship—the major component of the program's instructional system—is the primary vehicle used to facilitate the achievement of those two sets of institutional objectives.

Therefore, the position taken here is that those who are responsible for program design, development, and operation should give particular attention to: (1) those conceptualization processes which contribute to the design of the program as a whole; and (2) those conceptualization processes which provide a foundation for the instructional system which is a major component of the total program. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to briefly discuss the need for and the nature of conceptualization in the development of the Teacher Corps program and the instructional system which is a part of that program. Because of the focus of this session, only brief attention is given to the first of these processes—conceptualization of the total program—while somewhat greater emphasis is given to the second—conceptualization of the instructional system.

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Program Conceptualization

Program conceptualization should be viewed as an important process which permeates program design efforts. The following appears to be a most useful sequence for designing a Teacher Corps program as it consists of a series of tasks which give appropriate attention to the need for program conceptualization. While recognizing that the accomplishment of such tasks tends to be contextual, the sequence presented here does seem both valid and useful.

1. Designers of the program—representatives from the community, school district, teaching profession, college, and state, for example—should agree that the purpose of the program is to bring about institutional change—consistent with institutional objectives—which will significantly improve the educational opportunities of low-income, minority children.
2. Designers should conduct a need assessment which provides an analysis of the multi-institutional context and determines the needs of each institution in light of its explicit—and implicit—philosophies, goals, and/or objectives.
3. Designers should identify those institutional objectives to which the program—given federal guidelines and resource realities—is appropriately able to commit and obligate itself; that is, to identify and select those institutional objectives which the program will undertake as program goals and objectives.
4. Designers should give greater specificity—in light of the programmatic context—to each of those institutional objectives selected and should confirm each as a program objective.
5. Designers—having conceptualized the purposes of the program and having specified those purposes in the form of objectives to which the program is committed—should: (a) design activities which have the potential to bring about the achievement of those objectives, (b) design evaluation procedures which will provide formative and summative information regarding the progress of the program with regard to those objectives; and (c) design a management system which can operationalize the program design; that is, manage the program so that it can achieve its objectives. (Specification of the management system and management tasks permits the development of those personnel role descriptions which are so vital to effective program operation.)

This very brief description of a program design sequence suggests that conceptualization is vital to the operation of the program. Conceptualization of program purposes and objectives provides a base for the design,

development, and operation of program activities, evaluation, and management. The view here is that the greater the specificity and explicitness of that conceptualization, the greater the likelihood of program success.

Instructional System Conceptualization

Generally, the internship is viewed as the center of Teacher Corps programs for it is this training which is seen as the major vehicle for achieving program objectives. However, the training of interns is only one component of the program's instructional system for the program may be committed to the training of program staff, university faculty members, team leaders, principals, classroom teachers, community persons, and undergraduate teacher education students. Decisions in this regard result from the conceptualization of a program's instructional system. That conceptualization should build directly from the program's stated objectives and is twofold.

1. Designers of the instructional system—on the basis of the program objectives and the program design—should: (a) identify those persons the system will train; and (2) specify those role-related training objectives—competencies—which those individuals will be expected to acquire and demonstrate as a result of this training. This process results in a description of the instructional system's "curriculum content."
2. Designers of the instructional system should specify in great detail the operational characteristics of the instructional system; that is, designers should be very clear as to the nature of the instructional system. This process provides a foundation for the design, development, operation, and evaluation of the system.

Specification of Competencies. The specification of competencies should be built on a conceptualized role description; that is, specified in terms of the roles persons assume during the operation of the program—as in the case of program staff members—and/or in terms of those roles persons are expected to play upon the completion of the program—as in the case of interns. The literature (Cooper, Jones, and Weber, 1973; Houston, Dodl, and Weber, 1973; and Johnson and Shearron, 1973) has adequately

described these processes within a competency based-instructional system context which is quite compatible with the efforts of most Teacher Corps programs. Consequently, little else on this subject is needed here. However, there are several recommendations offered for your consideration.

1. Program effectiveness is viewed here as a function of two interrelated factors: (a) effective planning (program conceptualization and design), and (b) competent personnel (persons who know and do their job well). It is a well-conceptualized program which allows persons to fully understand and appreciate their responsibilities and it is a well-conceptualized instructional system (and selection process) which provides those persons with the competence to fulfill those responsibilities. Team leaders are perhaps the best case in point.

2. Role conceptualization and competency specification is best accomplished through collaborative efforts which result in a consciously pluralistic view incorporating a multiplicity of inputs. The experiences of the authors suggest that a very effective team can be one consisting of university instructors and team leaders who operate as peers with the guidance and assistance of a program development specialist and who actively seek input from a broader range of program personnel (interns, community persons, state personnel, teachers, administrators, and colleagues).

3. The generation of competencies from clearly conceptualized role descriptions allows designers to move adequately related instructional activities to intended outcomes. This results in "more relevant" instruction and evaluation. And in turn, the trainee is greatly assisted by being aware of the program's expectations within the framework of his personal aspirations; that is, the trainee is better able to link the instruction he experiences to the role to which he aspires. This enhances motivation and learning.

4. The conceptualization process is often time consuming. However, in terms of the benefits to be gained, designers can profit by viewing it a time wisely invested rather than time wasted.

Specification of Instructional System Characteristics. The specification of the instructional system's operational characteristics in advance of program operation is crucial for it is this process—perhaps more than any other—which sets the "rules of the game." Educational research and the experiences of many programs suggest that many problems are avoided when operational expectations are known in advance.

Consequently, the operational characteristics of the instructional system should be detailed prior to the initiation of training activities—the rules must be established before the game begins.

In this regard, designers face many decisions. But a few are suggested below:

1. Will instruction be competency based? If so, to what extent will the instructional system be competency based? And what will be the program's operational definition of competency based instruction?
2. Will instruction be campus-based, campus-centered, field-centered, or field-based. And what will be the program's operational definition of that alternative it selects?
3. Will instruction be modularized? If so, to what extent will the instructional system be modularized? And what will be the program's operational definition of modular instruction?
4. Will instruction be personalized? If so, to what extent will the instructional system be personalized? And what will be the program's operational definition of personalized instruction?

Obviously, it is both possible and important that designers deal with dozens of questions such as the above examples; these include questions regarding admission procedures; evaluation, grading, and reporting policies; and instructor and support personnel roles. The point is this: it is far easier to deal with these issues prior to instruction for two primary reasons: (1) those who are responsible for operating the program can be more clear as to their responsibilities; and (2) those who are participants in the training can be more aware of what is expected of them. This knowledge permits both groups to make better personal decisions with regard to program. Indeed, only such knowledge lets one know what he is "getting into" and permits him to "buy in" or "buy out."

Summary

This paper has attempted to very briefly describe the need for conceptualization in both program and instructional system design. Those who undertake the design, development, and operation of a Teacher Corps are faced with a set of complex tasks—and far too little time and money. Consequently, very often the tendency is to give little time to conceptualization. This is particularly the case with regard to the

instructional system. Too often development efforts consist of instructors making their courses "competency based" by writing a few instructional objectives—usually behavioral objectives *"a la Mager"*—and putting together a few modules. The result is not a competency based instructional system—or for that matter any kind of instructional system at all, but rather a jigsaw puzzle of rather ill-fitting pieces. The intent here is not to condemn for the press of time and lack of developmental resources has forced much of this on all who have undertaken such tasks. However, conceptualization of the program and of the instructional system is prerequisite to maximizing program effectiveness. It is clear that the benefits to be gained more than justify the effort.

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